1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
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ETHNOGRAPHICAL SURVEY OF THE MISKITO AND SUMU INDIANS OF HONDURAS AND NICARAGUA

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INTRODUCTION

131 The Miskito and Sumu inhabit the Atlantic side of Honduras and Nicaragua, from Rio Tinto or Black River (lat. 15° 50′ N.) to Rio Punta Gorda (lat. 11° 30′ N.). While the Miskito are found chiefly along the coast the Sumu are an inland tribe and extend westward within a short distance from the settlements of the Spanish-speaking population.

Together these two tribes occupy the larger part of the vast region generally known by the name of Mosquito Coast. This territory reaches from Cabo Honduras, near Trujillo, to Rio San Juan, at the Costa Rica boundary; that is, from the eleventh to the sixteenth degree north, an extension of about 550 miles by sea. From Cabo Honduras the coast runs at first in an easterly direction, then southeast as far as Cabo Gracias a Dios, whence it extends nearly due south.

103 Columbus, who discovered the country in 1502, gave the name *Costa de Orejas* "Coast of the Ears" to that part situated to the west of Cabo Gracias a Dios. The southern district of the Mosquito Coast became known in those days as *Cariay* or *Cariari*, *Veragua* or *Beragua*, *Castilla del Oro* "Golden Castile." These names were superseded by the Spanish-Mexican terms *Taguzgalpa* and *Tologalpa*, which stuck practically throughout the colonial period.

The name "Mosquito Coast" (Mosquito Territory or Mosquito Shore), employed by the English, has been taken from that of the principal Indian tribe, the Miskito, erroneously called Mosquito; the Spaniards translated it into *Mosquitia* and *Costa de Mosquitos* (*Costa Mosquita*). Many believe that this name has arisen from the numerous mosquitoes to be found in the country, while others think that the small islands off the coast, "which lie as thick as mosquitoes," may have caused the appellation.

3133 Orography.—The shore of the Mosquito Coast is partly alluvial and partly coralline; to the south of Cabo Gracias a Dios the land is gaining on the sea, but to the north of that cape the reverse appears to be the case.

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
. SA15 Mosquito SA15

133 In front of the coast, especially from Caratasca Lagoon to Monkey Point, or Punta Mico, are scattered numerous small islands, cays, coral reefs, shoals, and sand banks, which render navigation rather difficult.

The land rises gradually from the sea. The transverse ranges, radiating from the principal chain in the interior, form a series of terraces which gradually lessen in elevation until they disappear in the low coastal region. Low hills are met with at about 100 to 150 miles inland. Small isolated hills exist at different points within a short distance from the shore, and at Punta Mico and westward of Iriona spurs of the great central chain extend to the sea.

There are no active volcanoes. Earthquakes are not of frequent occurrence and they never do any damage; the heavy thunder occasionally conveys the impression that the earth is shaking.

133 487 HYDROGRAPHY.—The whole of this area is well watered by numerous streams running nearly parallel to each other; they flow into the Caribbean Sea, or rather into a chain of so-called lagoons or brackish water seas, of which the largest one is that of Caratasca. These water sheets are situated parallel with the coast and are separated from the sea, as well as from each other, by low, narrow, sandy necks of land, called locally "haulovers," from the custom of dragging the canoes over them. Thanks to this inland water system, canoes may proceed in smooth water, except for short intervals, from Iriona to Bluefields, thus avoiding the dangerous and unpleasant sea voyage during rough weather.

The rivers are in many parts the only means of communication. In the lower part of their course they are navigable for small sailing vessels, flat-bottomed steamboats, and motor boats. Beyond the region of the falls and rapids only small canoes and pitpans may continue, and they with great difficulty. The largest rivers of the Mosquito Coast are the following: Aguan, Tinto, Patuca, Coco (or Wanks), Grande (or Great), Escondido (or Bluefields), and San Juan.

During flood times these streams rise tremendously, occasionally as much as 40 feet during a single night. The crumbling banks bring down trees which, sweeping down the rapid current, render navigation dangerous. At places where the banks are low the neighboring country is inundated. These floods disappear as rapidly as they come. Owing to the great variations in level to which these rivers are subject, traffic is stopped or impeded occasionally, during the rainy season on account of the great impetuosity of the water and during the dry season from inadequate draft. In this respect Rio San Juan is an exception, the steadiness of its flow being maintained by the two great lakes of Nicaragua which act like a reservoir, and of which it is the only outlet.

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SA15 Mosquito SA15

The sediment, trees, logs, and the like, brought down by the rivers are deposited at their mouth at the sea, thus forming dangerous sand banks with only a few feet of water, which can be crossed in safety only by vessels of little draft. These openings into the sea, or bars, as they are called, are much safer when the streams flow first into a lagoon, instead of directly into the sea, for in that case the sediment is deposited in the lagoon.

CLIMATE.—The climate of the country is tropical, but it is greatly modified by the configuration of the soil and the prevailing winds. The nights are always cool. The average temperature is about 80° F. (26° C.); the thermometer rarely registers higher than 90° F. (32° C.) or falls below 65° F. (17° C.). January is the coldest month of the year.

The country is not as unhealthy as is generally supposed. The old English authors considered it fairly good, and there is no justification for the bad reputation it has now, not only among Europeans and North Americans but also among the Central Americans inhabiting the highlands of the interior or the Pacific slope. Numerous foreigners have lived in the country many years and have retained their health. Unless one is particularly susceptible to malaria or other tropical diseases, no bad effects are liable to attend a prolonged sojourn in the country, provided proper care is taken.

The cool sea breeze, which blows almost constantly around the lagoons, renders the air fresh and agreeable. During eight months of the year the east trades blow nearly uninterruptedly and greatly modify the effects of the heat, so that the latter is never suffocating. The great difference from our own climate does not consist so much in the higher temperature recorded as in the absence of really cold weather, which contributes so much to the vigor and "pep" of northern people.

From November to February northers may appear on the Nicaraguan coast, but they are not so dangerous to navigation as on the shore of Honduras. During a wet norther the weather is disagreeably cold, but a dry norther is pleasant and invigorating. From the middle of June to the middle of August the Nicaraguan coast is subject to squalls and sudden gusts of wind from the southeast and the south, which are a great danger to seagoing canoes. Revolving storms, commonly called hurricanes, occur occasionally on the coast, but they are never so violent and destructive as in the West Indies or around the Gulf of Mexico.

RAINFALL.—One may practically speak of two dry and two wet seasons on the Mosquito Coast. But these seasons are not well defined; the change from the rainy to the dry period, or vice versa, is not as marked as in the interior of Central America or on the Pacific

3: Pijoan D-5 (ca. 1945) 1946
SA15 Mosquito SA15

The Miskito Indians, numbering about 20,000, are a mixed race, since there has been much inter-marrying with negroes, creoles, Spaniards, Caribs, Sumu, Syrians and Chinese. About one-half of them have negroid physical characteristics, another third non-specific physical features and a few appear to be of pure Indian blood. There is, however, the same behavior pattern in all of them; they live together and there is no cultural differentiation on a physical basis. The culture and language are predominantly Indian, though some of them speak a little English or Spanish. The name "Mosquito Coast" may have been derived from the Indian tribe, the Miskito, or it may have been derived from the numerous mosquitoes found in the area.

The climate is humid and tropical. The average temperature along the seacoast rarely registers below 65° F. or above 90° F. Such pleasant temperatures are due to the trade winds that blow fairly steadily for about seven months of the year. From Bilwas Karma inland, the heat is intense, humid, and at times unbearable. At higher altitudes near the headwaters of the Coco (or Wanks) River, conditions are less severe. The whole area is well watered by many streams which empty into the larger rivers, which in turn drain into the Caribbean sea. In the jungle area these rivers are the only means of communication or transport. During flood times the rivers rise tremendously, often as much as thirty feet in a single night, the crumbling banks bringing down trees and everything along the edge. For this reason the villages are built high up on the banks and usually some distance from the stream. The average rainfall is reported to vary from 250 to 320 inches a year. There are two dry and two set seasons each year, but these conditions are only relative, since it is always humid in the interior. The dryest seasons are from about March to May and from late August to early October. The remainder of the time it rains almost incessantly, sometimes all day. In the dry season light showers occur frequently. These geophysical conditions contribute significantly to the food-agricultural status of the people.

Geographically the area can be divided as follows: along the seashore it is sandy, with an inland belt of about twenty miles, consisting of swamps; then an area fifty to one hundred miles wide of intermittent savannah, and finally the thick, dense, somewhat impenetrable jungle which covers everything, even the mountains. Violent winds and hurricanes are not infrequent.

Besides the Miskito and the Sumu, two other Indian tribes, the Paya and the Rama, live in eastern Nicaragua. The population of these tribes is unknown, but it is considered to be about 500. Conzemius[1] reported in 1932 that they numbered about 700 but stated that they